

Some Aspects of Education in Germany Today: A Case Study of School Facilities at Dreilinden Grundshule in Berlin

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Some Aspects of Education in Germany Today: A Case Study of School Facilities at Dreilinden Grundschule in Berlin-

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In his book The Story of English Architecture ①, Dr. Hugh Braun suggests that, in concrete terms, the architecture of the school -the school facility- is the most important factor in understanding the history of education in a given country. This study was also an attempt to gain an understanding of the school system of a country -in this case Germany- through the investigation of school architecture. It is difficult for Japanese to understand the educational system of a foreign country, particularly that of a country like Germany where the educational system may vary from state to state. Furthermore, there has been little written on the school system in Germany since the reunification of East and West Germany in 1990. It is hoped that this study can offer insight on the state of education in Germany today.

I have written this paper in English as I hope to be able to reexamine my findings through exchanges with Dr. Axel Kaufmann and teachers in Britain from whom I have already received valuable information. With the rapid changes in education being experienced in so many countries it is important that any discussion on education reform be influenced by the type of information obtained through field studies. I would like here to thank the Otsuka Society for the Study of School Administration for permission to write this paper in English and Joanna Matsunaga for checking this paper.

An outline of Dreilinden Grundshule

A Modern School

The Dreilinden Grundshule was built after the reunification of East and West Germany in 1990, so is perhaps the most modern facility in Berlin. Because there are many old, small schools in Germany. However the school is modern not only in its architecture, but its educational approach.②

Woods

The Grundschule school is located near Berlin-Bannsee station which is between the old East and West Berlin Boundaries. In spite of being located near the station, the school has a very peaceful appearance because it is surrounded by a wood. In Germany, schools are often surrounded by woods which are also important teaching materials of the school. (Figure 1.) An environmental education is done through the activities in woods.

School Structure

Although German education system vary from state to state because of Germany's pre-war decentralization policy, most elementary schools follow a basic four-year system. However, Berlin, where this school is located, has a six-year system. As of September 1997, the school had an enrolment of 254, not including children of Turkish origin. Each grade is made up of two classes, except for the 1st grade which only has 1 class. There are 24 teachers, including 12 part-time teachers. Each class has an average of 23 students.

According to the statistics in 1993, the number of public primary schools in Germany is 17,671 and 3,446,759 students are taught in them. Generally speaking, the school size in Germany is smaller than the one in Japan.

Principal

In Germany, most principals are responsible for teaching classes.

The principal, Dr. Axel Kaufmann was a vice-principal for 11 years before becoming the principle 7 years ago, and was involved with the concept behind the school in the planning stages. Yoshihiro Sakakibara (Yamanashi University) points out that posting principals and teachers at the one school over an extensive period of time is one of the strong points of education in Germany ③. This was also my impression but unfortunately there is no space for an extended treatment of this issue here.

A school for all

Participation

In Japan, there are often the case that school design is decided without teacher or parent participation. The Grundschule, however, was built after much teacher and parent discussion had occurred. The independence of schools and parent participation have been permanent features of German education as a result of the 1973 Council of Education's (Deutscher Bildungsrat) recommendations. This idea of participation also impacts on school architecture. ④

The staff Room

At this school I was very much aware that the staff room served more as a lounge than as a work room as it does in Japanese schools. According to the principal, parents are easily able to meet with teachers to consult about their children here. In this way, the staff room symbolizes the strong relationship between teachers and parents. (Photo 1.)

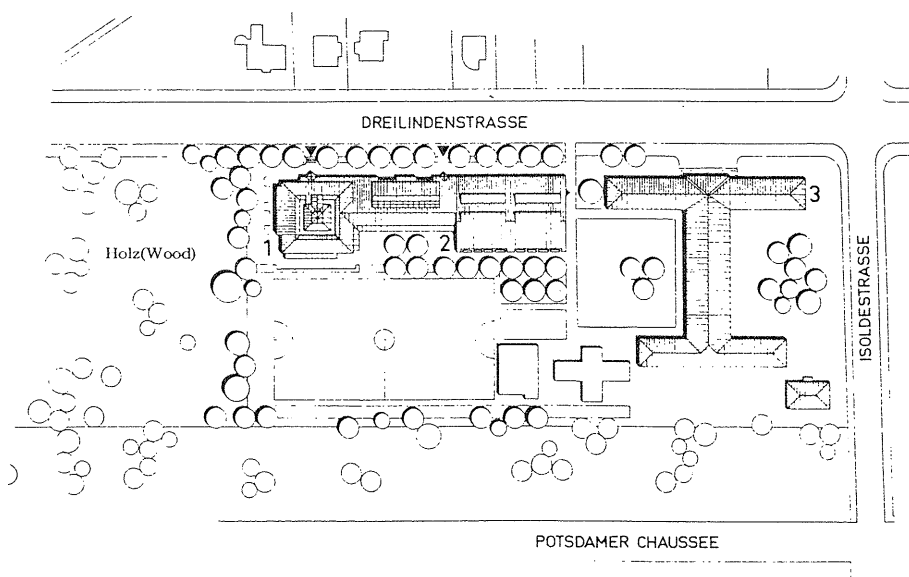


Figure 1. An aerial view of the Dreilinden Grundschule.

※ 1 Grundschule, 2 Sporthalle, 3 Gymnasium
(main building) (gymnasium) (secondary school)

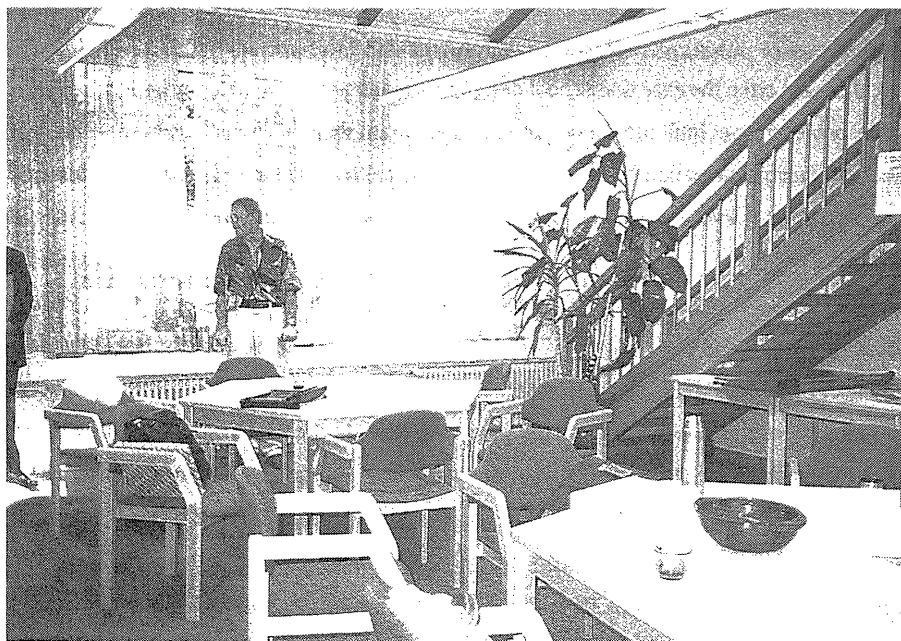
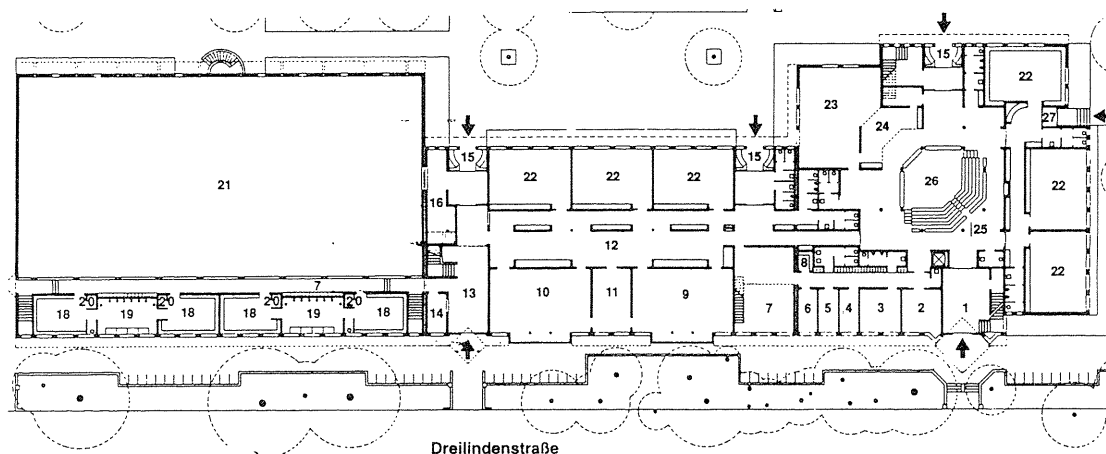
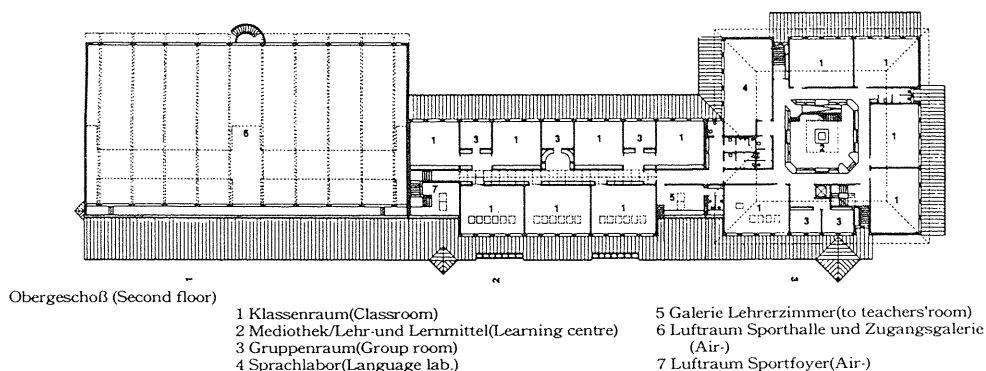


Photo 1. Principal Kaufmann in the staffroom.

Figure 2. plans of the Dreilinden Grundschule.



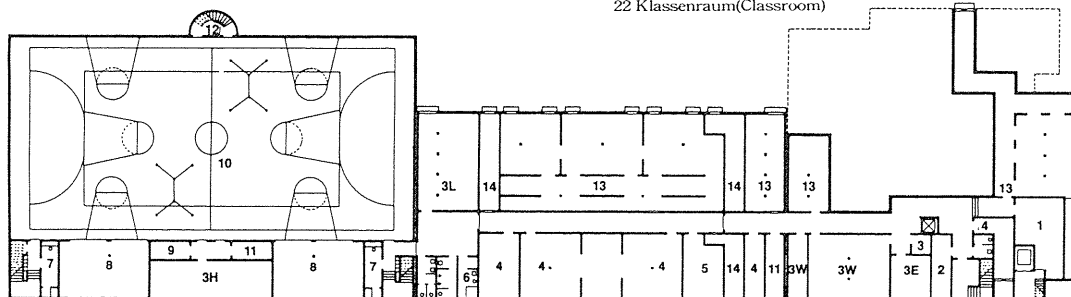
Erdgeschoß(First floor)

- 1 Windfang,Haupteingang(Main gate)
- 2 Sekretariat(Secretary's office)
- 3 Schulleiter(Pincipal's room)
- 4 Erste Hilfe(-)
- 5 Elternsprechzimmer(Parent room)
- 6 Lehrerruberraum(Teachers'est)
- 7 Lehrerzimmer/Konferenz(Staff room)
- 8 Tecküche(Tea kitchen)

- 9 TNU(-)
- 10 Werkraum(Workshop)
- 11 Nebenraum TNU,Werken(-)
- 12 Flur mit Garderoben und Vitrinen(Corridor with locker room)
- 13 Sportfoyer(-)
- 14 Hausmeister/Hallenwart (Caretaker's room)
- 15 Pausenausgang mit Sitzbänken(Rest area)

- 16 Außengeräteraum/ Anlieferung Sportgeräte (Tool room)
- 17 Erschließungsgalerie Sport(Gallery)
- 18 Umkleideraum(Changing room)
- 19 Dusch- und Waschraum (Shower room)
- 20 Einzelumkleideräume (Changing room)
- 21 Luftraum Sporthalle(Air-)
- 22 Klassenraum(Classroom)

- 23 Mehrzweckraum(Multi-purpose room)
- 24 Nebenraum MZ/Bühne(-)
- 25 Halle,Versammlungsbereich(Hall)
- 26 Sitzarena(Sitting space)
- 27 Eingang Primarstufe/ Pausenausgang(Way in)



Kellergeschoß Sportebene(Basement)

- 1 Trafostation(-)
- 2 Reinigungspersonal (Cleaning room)
- 3 Technik H.L.W.E(Machinery room)
- 4 Lager(Store room)
- 5 Hausmeister-Werkstatt (Workshop)

- 6 Behinderten-Umkleide(WC)
- 7 Lehrzimmer(Staff room)
- 8 Geräteraum(Tool room)
- 9 Regieraum (Staff room)
- 10 Spielfeld ebene Sport(Gym)
- 11 Putzgeräte (Tool room)

- 12 Notausgang(Exit)
- 13 Kriechkeller(-)
- 14 Flurentrauchung (Store room)

Facilities of Dreilinden Grundshule

Open Space

The Grundschule is three-storey building which is comparatively large for elementary schools in Germany. The school also shares a gymnasium and playground with the secondary school next door. On entering the Grundshule through the main door we can see the large open space where plays, concerts and so on can be held. Incorporating open spaces into the school architecture was first seen in England but it is not always the case that elementary schools in western countries have this feature. But, it is important to note that these open spaces deal with expression as an important subject. This use of open spaces provides a glimpse into the underlying difference between Western and Japanese education. In Japan, the number of schools with such open spaces is increasing, although in many of these schools the spaces are not utilized in any meaningful way.

The Classroom

In Japanese schools classrooms are placed along one side of a corridor. This school, however, has a three-dimensional composition rather than the linear one which characterizes the Japanese school. Each classroom in the Grundshule slots into individual spaces within the structure of the school creating a harmonious atmosphere. (Figure 2 and 3.)

In Germany, it is believed that the space within the classrooms in an individual grade should complement the educational development of the children. It should be noted that open-space schools are not always a necessary feature of education which stresses individual development. In German schools, where individual development is stressed, this focus is reflected more strongly in closed, original spaces rather than in open spaces.

The Steiner Education

The pictures painted on the door of each classroom is also a characteristic of the school. (Photo 2.) Advice on the pictures was given by a relative of Michael Ende, the author of Momo, living in the neighborhood. Michael Ende was a student at the Steiner school, where his genius as a writer had the chance to flower. The elements of art and manual training seen in the Steiner Method are reflected here in these pictures. The Steiner Method philosophy will perhaps also influence the education of the handicapped children who have recently entered the Grundschule. ⑤ The motif of the pictures is based on scenes from around the school. It is likely that the students are learning the importance of protecting the environment from these pictures.

Reunification and Financial Difficulties

Since reunification in 1990 the German economy has been straitened. Moreover, the crime rate in Berlin is rising rapidly. (in 1997 the rise in the crime rate was the highest in the history and the unemployed rate is 18.7%.) At the Grundshule, the students are not able to fully use the special facilities due to lack of equipments. Often, the expensive equipments have been stolen from classrooms. This is an unfortunate aspect for the principal who is already wrestling with the task of implementing new programmes.

<NOTES>

- ① The Story of English Architecture, Faber and Faber Limited, London 1950
- ② I was assisted in my interview with the principal, Dr. Axel Kaufmann, by Takeo Matsuno, the Secretary-General of the Chamber of Commerce in Berlin, and Hiroyuki Kawashima, a former student. I would thank them here.
- ③ Yoshihiro Sakakibara (Yamanashi University) had been undertaking a year's research in Germany up until last April. His comments on the advantage and disadvantage of German policy of long-term posting at an individual school are as follows:

advantages-teachers are able to a. pursue long-term methods and watch students' progress

b. communicate more easily with parents, especially in the elementary years

disadvantage-a. most teachers cannot undertake administrative posts, hampering teachers' organization

b. the staff are not exposed to a variety of educational methods, regional differences or diverse groups of children, perhaps restricting, professional development

"Gakkou Keiei" Daiichi Houki aug. 1997 pp41-42

- ④ I was given much information on the actual situation regarding parent participation in Germany, by Yoshiaki Yanagisawa (Kagawa University).
School Administration in Germany, Akishobou, 1996.

- ⑤ Takeo Yoshida (Kouchi University) points out the relationship between the educational thought of Steiner and class-teacher system through his analysis of the Free Waldorf school. He states that Steiner's class-teacher system encourages a close relationship between the individual child and the teacher.

"The Feature of the Class-Teacher System at the Free Waldorf school-From the Aspect of Educational Thought of Rudolf Steiner-", Journal of JASEA No36, 1994 p114.

I think that the three-dimensional lay-out of the Grundschule could also be seen as a Steiner influence.

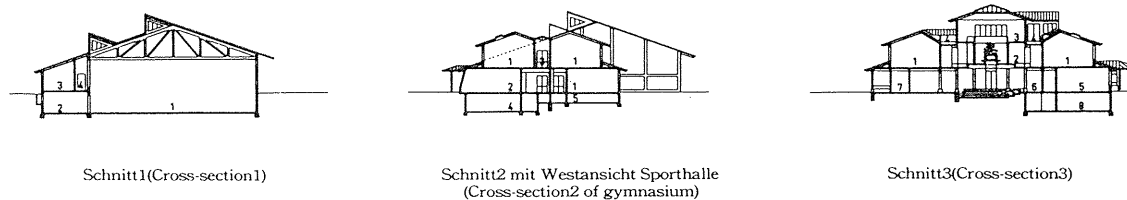


Figure 3. Cross-section views of the school.



Photo 2 . Pictures featured on the door of individual classrooms.